

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 AID-20 DPW-01 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01

PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 RSR-01 /106 W

----- 032091

P 080445Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5662

INFO USDEL JEC PARIS

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG PRIORITY

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 14302

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: UPPER HOUSE ELECTION: AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE
PROSPECTS

1. SUMMARY: WITH THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTION CAMPAIGN
WELL UNDERWAY, INCLUDING A JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE OF
THE FOUR COMPETING LSATES HELD AUGUST 6, A PICTURE
EMERGES OF THE PROSPECTS. SLATES NOS. 1 AND 2,
AFFILIATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT, REMAIN THE CLEAR FRONT-
RUNNERS. HOWEVER, SLATE NO. 3 SHOWS SURPRISING VIGOR
IN ITS PRESUMABLY HOPELESS CAUSE, DEFINITELY OUT-
DISTANCING THE LACKLUSTER NO. 4. THIS COULD ALTER
THE VOTING PATTERN SOMEWHAT, THOUGH NOT ENOUGH TO DEFEAT
THE TWO PRESUMED WINNERS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE FOUR SLATES COMPETING IN THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTION
HELD A JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE AT SAIGON CITY HALL AUGUST
6. TOGETHER WITH THEIR POSTERS AND LEAFLETS AND THEIR PRE-
RECORDED TELEVISION AND RADIO TALKS BROADCAST ON TWO
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SUCCESSIVE DAYS THUS FAR, THIS CONFERENCE GIVES A USEFUL

PICTURE OF HOW THE SLATES ARE PLAYING THE CAMPAIGN. EACH SLATE HAD TEN MINUTES TO SPEAK AND TEN MINUTES TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AT THE CONFERENCE. THE QUESTIONS FROM VIETNAMESE JOURNALISTS WERE PENETRATING AND SOMETIMES SLIGHTLY BARBED. THE SAIGON PRESS AND THE GOVERNMENT RADIO AND TELEVISION COVERED THE EVENT BUT CONCENTRATED ON THE BLANDER EXCHANGES.

3. SLATE NO. 1: THE "DEMOCRACY" TICKET MAKES NO EFFORT TO HIDE ITS AFFILIATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT. ITS APPARENT STRATEGY, IN FACT, IS TO RELY RATHER OPENLY ON THIS CONNECTION TO CREATE AN IMAGE OF "RESPONSIBILITY" AND CLOSENESS TO POWER. THE SLATE'S LEAFLET AND POSTER SLOGANEERING IS THREE-FOLD: "BUILD DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, AND PROGRESS; DEVELOP THE NATION; RESIST COMMUNISM". ITS PLATFORM ADVOCATES, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF A POLITICAL PARTY STRUCTURE THAT RESPECTS THE PRINCIPLE OF OPPOSITION FOR THE MINORITY. IN THE AUG 6 PRESS CONFERENCE, THE LIST'S SPOKESMEN COMMENTED IN ANSWER TO QUESTIONS THAT FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY ALWAYS DEPEND ON REALITIES AND MUST CURRENTLY BE LIMITED BECAUSE OF THE WAR. AS LONG AS THE ENEMY VIOLATES THE CEASEFIRE AND NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS REMAIN IN THE SOUTH, FULL FREEDOM CANNOT BE ESTABLISHED.

4. SLATE NO. 2: THE "WHITE ELEPHANT" TICKET ALSO TRIES TO BUILD AN IMAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY, BUT IT CALLS ITSELF "INDEPENDENT" AND DOWNPLAYS THE GOVERNMENT CONNECTION. IT DEPENDS HEAVILY ON THE PRESTIGE OF ITS LEADER TRAN VAN LAM. AN EXPERIENCED PERFORMER IN PUBLIC, HE MADE A DISTINCTLY BETTER IMPRESSION THAN ANY OTHER SPOKESMAN AT THE AUG 6 PRESS CONFERENCE. THE SLATE'S SLOGAN IS "SOLIDARITY FOR PROGRESS". ITS PLATFORM STRESSES THAT THE RVN MUST BE STRONG IN ALL FIELDS, PARTICULARLY POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC, TO SUPPORT ITS CAUSE, ENCOURAGE SUPPORT FROM FRIENDLY NATIONS, AND COMPEL THE COMMUNISTS TO NEGOTIATE RATHER THAN WAIT. DOMESTICALLY, THE SLATE ADVOCATES CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS, SCHOOLS, HOUSING, AND HOSPITALS AND AN ACTIVE PROGRAM OF ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS, CIVIL SERVANTS, MILITARY PERSONNEL, AND VETERANS. TAXATION AND THE RICE ALLOWANCE SYSTEM FOR CIVIL SERVANTS AND

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SOLDIERS ARE SPECIFICALLY CITED AS NEEDING ATTENTION. THE SLATE ALSO CALLS FOR A BI-PARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM AND A "SERIOUS DIALOGUE" BETWEEN THE UPPER HOUSE AND THE EXECUTIVE. AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE, LAM ADROITLY SIDE-STEPPED QUESTIONS CONCERNING AMENDMENT OF ARTICLE 4 OF THE CONSTITUTION, SUPPORT FOR A THIRD TERM FOR PRESIDENT THIEU, AND HIS INTENTIONS TO RETURN TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

5. SLATE NO. 3: COMPOSED OF RELATIVELY YOUNG TECHNOCRATS, THE "SHEAF OF RICE" SLATE TRIES TO COME THROUGH AS A FRESH NEWCOMER ON THE POLITICAL SCENE. ITS EAGERNESS IN WHAT MOST OBSERVERS CONSIDER A LOSING CAUSE IS A PLEASANT SURPRISE. THE THEME IS THAT OLD-TIME POLITICIANS HAVE FAILED, AND THERE MUST BE NEW BLOOD TO REJUVENTATE THE LEGISLATURE. THE PLATFORM EMPHASIZES ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ISSUES, REFLECTING THE PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE LIST'S LEADING MEMBERS. ON WAR AND PEACE QUESTIONS, THE LINE IS RATHER HAWKISH. RECOGNIZING THEIR HANDICAP IN THE ELECTION AGAINST SLATES 1 AND 2, THEY DECLARED IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THEIR REASON FOR RUNNING WAS TO TEST WHETHER THOSE TWO SLATES TRULY HAVE THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE. BY CAMPAIGNING, THEY SAID, THEY WERE DEFENDING THE CONSTITUTION. IF ELECTED, THEY WOULD BE INDEPENDENT AND NOT A SYSTEMATIC OPPOSITION. THE SLATE ALSO CLAIMED AT THE CONFERENCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD SET UP VARIOUS OBSTACLES TO ITS CAMPAIGN.

6. SLATE NO. 4: RUNNING A POOR FOURTH IS THE "POPULAR SELF-DETERMINATION" SLATE. IT CONVEYED A LACK OF LUSTER IMAGE IN THE CONFERENCE (THOUGH, IN FAIRNESS, BY BEING LAST ON THE PROGRAM IT FACED A LESS ATTENTIVE AUDIENCE). ITS PLATFORM IS LARGELY COMPOSED OF VARIATIONS ON THE "NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND CONCORD" THEME. THE SLATE CLAIMS IT HAS A TRUE "PEOPLE'S NATURE" AND TRIES TO RECALL VIETNAMESE VALUES OF MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO. DOMESTICALLY, IT RECOMMENDS RECONSIDERATION OF TAX MEASURES, ESPECIALLY THE NEW VALUE ADDED TAX. ALLEGED GOVERNMENT-IMPOSED HANDICAPS TO THE LIST'S CAMPAIGNING WERE MENTIONED AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE.

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7. COMMENTS: JUDGING FROM THE PERFORMANCES THUS FAR, SLATES NOS. 1 AND 2 SEEM CLEARLY HEADED FOR THE VICTORY GENERALLY PREDICTED FOR THEM. HOWEVER, THE ACTIVISM OF SLATE NO. 3 AND THE POOR SHOWING OF NO. 4 PUTS A MINOR NEW ELEMENT INTO THE EQUATION. A CONSIDERABLY MINORITY, ESPECIALLY IN SAIGON AND OTHER CITIES, MAY VOTE FOR SLATE NO. 3 ALONG WITH EITHER SLATE NO. 1 OR SLATE NO. 2. (EACH VOTER MAY VOTE FOR EITHER ONE OR TWO SLATES; MOST WILL PRESUMABLY VOTE FOR TWO.) THIS COULD SPOIL WHAT IS ASSUMED TO BE THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY, NAMELY INDUCING MOST VOTERS TO CAST STRAIGHT PRO-GOVERNMENT BALLOTS FOR BOTH NOS. 1 AND 2.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 AUG 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973SAIGON14302
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS MARTIN
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: SAIGON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730850/aaaabkyr.tel
Line Count: 167
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 DEC 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06-Dec-2001 by shawdg>; APPROVED <28-Dec-2001 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UPPER HOUSE ELECTION: AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROSPECTS
TAGS: PINT, VS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005